Post-Liberal Statebuilding in Central Asia

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Reform Deadlock for Stability? 
The Civic Union ‘For Reforms and Result’

Introduction: Community security and police reform as post-liberal statebuilding

This chapter analyses the emergence, achievements and dilemmas of the NGO network Civic Union ‘For Reforms and Result’ as a case of an organization that advocates more representative security provision and law enforcement. Having analysed two types of entities which operated exclusively on the communal or municipal level in the last two chapters (namely LCPCs and TYCs), the analysis presented here offers a useful contrast that helps demonstrate the importance of engaging in debates on national-level policy making and institutional design (as hinted at in Chapter 6), but also points to the obstacles and difficulties encountered by organizations trying to do this. As I will show, the contestations and deadlock occurring in the negotiation of scope and content of police reform can also be mapped onto the controversy between competing imaginaries of social order proposed in Chapter 4. Thus, the Civic Union clearly situated its agenda in the Western ‘liberal peace’ imaginary and in discourses of transparent, accountable and democratically governed institutions. Not surprisingly, its proposals for institutional and policy reforms have evoked concerns among governmental and policy-making elites about the control and stability they would be able to retain in the case of such reforms. To overcome such reservations and resistance to reform measures on various levels, the Civic Union members needed to draw on the other two imaginaries, particularly that of ‘politics of sovereignty’, to frame police reform as a matter of building and shaping sustainable state–society relations and as being in the interest of patriotism and national dignity. On the other hand, the dilemma of the Civic Union’s position is that in order to have their demands and ideas for
police reform heard, they also needed to approach this topic constructively and with at least some degree of cooperation with law enforcement officials. As I have shown, especially in Chapter 5, many people might barely, or even not at all, be able to embrace such cooperativeness in light of the violence and injustice done during and after the 2010 events. Thus, attempts to take constructive steps toward (re)building accountable institutions can appear extremely challenging in this wider socio-historical perspective.

While the insights into the Civic Union’s community-level work are an important addition to the last two chapters’ analyses of community security and peacebuilding processes and their implications for wider statebuilding trajectories, the network’s agenda on reforming the police, law enforcement organs and internal affairs structures points to the important part that these have in the creation and consolidation of state structures that can enable sustainable peace. Police and security sector reform more generally are seen to be a vital part of ‘liberal peace’-style transition after Socialism or colonial governance (Lewis, 2011; Jackson, 2011). More generally, the ‘rule of law’ has been identified as a problematic area with a prevalence of state-centric top-down logic driven by regressive post-conflict governmentality and peacebuilding (see Richmond, 2011, pp 48, 220ff). Mirroring this picture and the generally diverging levels of alignment with democratization and transition agendas, police reform is a field in which different Central Asian states have asserted their sovereignty and control over domestic matters by limiting cooperation and the degree or speed of harmonization with internationally promoted institutions (see Lewis, 2011). In a similar way, Kyrgyzstan’s police forces are a domain in which successive governments have shown limited readiness to cooperate or let actions follow their announcements. This reluctance has been justified as a consequence of two recent revolutions in the country, which make effective policing and order-maintenance capacities a priority for governmental actors, while open debate is seen more sceptically (Marat, 2018). Principles such as the strict hierarchy of command, internal accountability and confidentiality of internal data and procedures have thus appeared too dear to power holders to reconsider them upon international or domestic actors’ demands.

Civil society actors, especially organizations defending human rights (pravozashitniki), have undertaken comprehensive efforts to effect more bold steps toward the reform of the police, law enforcement and judiciary. The main desire among activists but also ordinary people is for the police to become more trustworthy and accountable in fulfilling its mandate and complying to laws and regulations. The everyday experience of Kyrgyzstani citizens stands in contrast to this ideal picture. Petty corruption, for example in the form of bribe extortion by traffic police, and negligence of duty of officers in recording and investigating crimes, have become a normality for some people rather than an exception (see Marat, 2018, pp 90ff). The cases
of Aizada Kanatbekova and Burulai Turdaly kyzy, young women killed by men kidnapping them as would-be brides, sparked a particular outcry and demands for a change in the police approach toward gender-based and domestic violence (see Eshalieva, 2021). The harsh criticism of the police, as in the latter cases or in the aftermath of the Osh events where impunity and a disproportionate persecution of Uzbeks have been admonished (see Bennett, 2016), is generally dismissed by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA) or government officials. While civil society has mostly focused on identifying procedural irregularities and human rights abuses and called for corrections through moral pressure and public campaigns (Tiulegenov, 2017), relatively few non-state actors have tried to propose concrete institutional changes in order to improve the performance of the Kyrgyz police, as shown in Marat’s (2018) analysis of police reform efforts since 2010.

In this context, the work of the Civic Union ‘For Reforms and Result’ (Grazhdanskii Soiuz ‘Za reformy i rezultat’, hereafter CU) is remarkable, as the organization has managed to become actively involved in the discussion, design and implementation of police reform. De jure a network of 22 NGOs with a central office in Bishkek and member organizations spread across the country, the organization was admitted to consultations with top-level policy makers in early 2013 and has subsequently both continued to lobby change on the national level and applied its participatory community security approach in selected localities throughout Kyrgyzstan. The founding and strategic positioning of the organization in the years 2011 and 2012 was supported by the UK-based international NGO Saferworld, which continued to play a role in advising and supporting the CU, both on the basis of concrete project cooperation and funding but also aside from concrete programmes. Thanks to this support, the CU has evolved as a self-sufficient entity with a significant number of projects that generate enough paid work for a small office in the centre of Bishkek.

The core of active members consists of around ten Bishkek residents, mostly in their late 20s and 30s but also including more experienced activists and ex-internal affairs staff. Having witnessed and actively joined the meetings around the 2010 revolution, especially the younger cohort of the activists is driven by a vision of building a democratic Kyrgyzstan with accountable institutions; an agenda they had initially pursued in an NGO called Liberal Youth Alliance (Ru.: Alians liberalnoi molodezhi) which played a key role in the establishment of the CU. As discussed in further detail in Chapter 3, the cooperation with this network was the most in-depth and exhaustive one and has continued into the present. My offer to accompany (Ru.: soprovozhdat) the CU in the form of regular interviews, conversations and attendance at their events and to thus provide them with a ‘view from the side’ (vzglyad so storony) was warmly welcomed by my primary contact and other activists. This, together with the common contacts with my other
cooperation partner, Saferworld, provided the necessary trust and familiarity to admit me to participatory observations of meetings with CSWGs in different localities, which are part of this analysis. While the analytical insights, advice and support I gave as part of my research were welcome, they were not overly surprising to the CU members and, as discussed further in Chapter 3, the concrete benefits that academic collaborators can yield for NGOs still remain to be further clarified.

Amid the challenges posed to state actors in the aftermath of the ‘Osh events’ (see Chapters 5 and 6), the contribution of the CU’s efforts to build a cooperative relationship between citizens and state institutions cannot be underestimated. As expression of this vision, and echoing a broader trend toward community-based security approaches that emphasize local-level cooperation over central, national-level reform and policy implementation, the CU coined its own approach, named SoBezopasnost or Co-Security, which emphasizes cooperation between the population, municipal authorities, civil society and law enforcement organs (see introductory quote in the Introduction, CURR., 2015, p 3). While this approach appears clearly preferable to other understandings of security that prioritize state, institutional and corporate interests, this chapter shows how introducing and implementing such a vision into law enforcement legislation and practice has so far proved all the more difficult. I interpret this trajectory of the CU primarily as an illustration of the epistemic dimension of the post-liberal mode of governance, through which we can understand why and how certain forms of knowledge (and related policies and practices) may remain marginal even if, from the objectivist standpoint of a (neo-)liberal episteme, they seem absolutely preferable and were also acknowledged as such as illustrated in the case of then Prime Minister (PM) Isakov on a discussion forum in 2018 (see page 196).

As I have argued in the Introduction, the competition of various forms of knowledge and the imaginaries of social order associated with them render the trajectory from collective thinking and debates on social ordering toward practical and policy solutions messy and sticky. Rather than leading from a problem to a discussion and, finally, to implementation of solutions, this nexus can assume a circular and never-ending path, as the chapter’s fourth section on policy makers’ ignorance of evidence in favour of reform measures shows. This post-liberal epistemic pluralism and the ‘post-truth’ (Pomerantsev, 2016) logic by which it often operates, is most effectively conceived with the help of critical security studies perspectives on knowledge production. Thus, Trine Villumsen Berling has argued that ‘the products of science – for example, facts, scientific models, data – can be mobilized strategically by agents … to secure for themselves the power to impose the legitimate version of the social world and its divisions’ (2011, p 393). On the other hand, she exhibits how in political practice, the lack
of knowledge often does ‘not hinder governments from taking action’ and that ‘[s]overeign decisions (and not democratic deliberations) are therefore taken at the limit of knowledge’ (Berling, 2011, p 388, original emphasis; see Lottholz, 2021). In this sense, knowledge and even ‘objective’ evidence, as well as the lack thereof, can be overruled by the executive decisions of sovereign governments, as has been sadly illustrated by US presidential decisions on the 2003 Iraq invasion or by various governments’ inaction and denial during the COVID-19 epidemic. The ignoring of objective facts (whether they are framed in scientific or more lay terms) in the name of state security and sovereignty is a key feature of the interaction between the CU and Kyrgyzstani authorities, which reaffirms the argument for a post-liberal perspective on statebuilding, as I discuss at the end of the chapter.

The chapter continues by sketching the emergence of the CU and the shift it underwent from engaging exclusively in political activism to its members proving themselves as ‘experts’ in the realm of law enforcement and security. The third section provides a critical analysis of the CU’s approach of ‘cooperative security’ or Co-Security, indicating how a community-level pilot project did not always produce the inclusionary and representative forms of security envisaged by the activists but nevertheless served to substantiate the network’s claim to practical competence, expertise and a legitimate reform agenda. Subsequently, I analyse the network’s ‘knowledge-production’ activities that further strengthened their case for an alternative approach to police reform and show how these have been dismissed and ignored by authorities as part of a re-monopolization of the police reform process and a wider tendency from post- to anti-liberal politics in Kyrgyzstan. This deadlock and the successes nevertheless achieved by the CU are linked back to the book’s overall argument about the regressive results of statebuilding interventions and assistance with a ‘liberal peace’ approach.

From political activism to forging security expertise

This section traces the tension between the CU’s grounding in civil society organizations and municipal-level institutions across Kyrgyzstan on the one hand, and the continuous rejection or deferral of deep-reaching reform measures in law enforcement and internal affairs organs on the other, from the early beginning of the CU’s activities to the time of writing. It does so by considering the two key roles and corresponding practices the network’s activists have engaged in over the years (see Lottholz, 2021 for a more in-depth analysis), which can be glossed as activism – understood as

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1 This and section four are adapted from Lottholz (2021).
mobilization of various forms of support and participation in debates for new approaches to police reform, and expertise – a form of knowledge and professional capital that the network needed to demonstrate and base its claims on.

The formation of the CU began with an initiative for an ‘Alternative conception of the reform for the law enforcement agencies’. In 2011–12, activists of the various constitutive NGOs organized 32 public hearings in localities all over Kyrgyzstan and collected 10,950 signatures in support of the above-mentioned ‘Alternative conception’, which was handed over to parliament and the government. The network’s grounded approach and adaptation to the needs and habits of the semi–urban and rural population is best illustrated in its use of a quarterly newspaper, in which the most recent achievements and future agenda are presented in both Russian and the Kyrgyz language (see Appendix 3 for the title page of an issue from 2012).

In presenting parliament and the authorities with the petition, the network took a strong and determined stance, announcing: ‘We, the citizens of Kyrgyzstan, demand that the leadership [or rukovodstva] of Kyrgyzstan set in motion major [kardinalnykh] reforms of the police without any delay!’ They did not spare their addressees vocal criticism of the lack of progress so far: ‘Things have not developed beyond words. Enough with the cheating! [Khvatit falshi!] We ask the authorities to keep their promise and immediately start to transform the old police into a modern police [nachat preobrazovanie staroi militsii v sovremennuiu politsiiu]’ (emphasis in original). The desired reform was laid out in detail in the ‘Alternative conception for the reform of the Ministry of Internal Affairs’, and included (1) the creation of a normative–legal basis regulating the activities of Internal Affairs organs in line with the constitution and international human rights standards; (2) optimization of the administrative system of the MIA, including redefinition of tasks carried out on various levels; (3) improvement of cadre recruitment policy, including increased hiring of staff from non-military and non-partisan backgrounds; (4) more transparency and accountability of law enforcement agencies

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2 Petition accessed at https://ru.petitions.net/za_reformu_mvd. All translations from Russian documents are the author’s.
3 The terms militsiia and politsiia are used synonymously for ‘police’ in Russian, although militsiia is clearly associated with Soviet structures and policing practices.
vis-à-vis society; and (5) monitoring and assessment of the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies.

Overall, the network’s efforts to collect, formulate and voice such demands had some effect in influencing the government’s and the MIA’s approach to reform in the subsequent months and years. A major step was the consultation in February 2012 with the then PM Satybaldiev, who promised to take on most of the activists’ suggestions. Further steps by the government followed suit, especially in the form of a series of decrees (postanovleniia), which satisfied to some extent the CU’s demand for a normative–legal basis for the regulation and reform of law enforcement organs. The efforts of other international and intergovernmental organizations and fellow civil society actors (see Marat, 2018, pp 91ff), also played an important part in pushing the government to take these steps, and some of the changes had already been set out on the government’s agenda to begin with. Still, the CU has arguably contributed to this outcome by lobbying these changes from a point of view that expressed the will of Kyrgyzstani citizens, as well as in the concrete ideas and concepts it proposed to introduce into the reform process. Table 7.1 provides a list of key decrees and changes, together with a brief content summary and comments assessing their often declaratory character.

While not all changes proposed by the CU were taken on by the government, PM Satybaldiev signed decree No 220 on 30 April 2012 tasking the MIA to work on an ‘Action plan’ for the realization of the reform and introducing the so-called Council for the Reform and Development of the System of Law and Order in the Kyrgyz Republic as the main mechanism for the implementation of the reform. Much of the subsequent interaction of the CU and other selected civil society representatives with the authorities took place in this council, which was officially formed in September 2013 and included representatives from the government and its administration both at national and local levels, as well as advisers from intergovernmental organizations such as the OSCE.

It soon became clear, however, that this council did not affect the design and implementation of concrete reform measures and, even worse, seemed to help the government and MIA delay such processes, making it a ‘dialogue platform without actual administrative tasks’ and without mandate to make

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5 See protocol from the meeting (in Russian): http://reforma.kg/sites/default/files/
7 Available at: http://mvd.kg/index.php/ru/program-gov/reform
8 Russian: Совет по реформированию и развитию системы пропорциональки в Кыргызской Республике.
### Table 7.1: Legislative changes in police reform since 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date, type, no.</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Comments and assessment</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decree No 220, 30 April 2012</strong></td>
<td>‘On measures for the reform of internal affairs organs’: • Tasked the MIA with ‘working out an Action Plan for the realization of [reform] measures’ • Creation of Council for the Reform and Development of the System of Law and Order in the Kyrgyz Republic (KR) as main body for overseeing implementation of the reform</td>
<td>• Good first step, although rather vague provisions; more details needed • No effective oversight or sanctioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decree No 81, 24 February 2015</strong></td>
<td>Introduces guidelines on the foundations of the ‘complex assessment’ of the activity of law enforcement organs, including external assessment through participatory methods</td>
<td>Development of methodology for external assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decree No 547, 30 July 2015</strong></td>
<td>• ‘On the mechanisms of interaction of internal affairs organs of the KR with civil society institutions’ • Defining functions of ‘Public Council of the MIA’ as key platform for communication with civil society actors and the public • Further details on role of neighbourhood inspectors and so-called LCPCs as main actors and platforms in the interaction between society and law enforcement organs (on municipal level)</td>
<td>Good description of necessary steps, but no concrete provisions on enforcement; implementation ultimately up to individual law enforcement units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Presidential Decree No 161, 18 July 2016</strong></td>
<td>‘On measures to reform the law enforcement system of the KR’ • Definition of a strategy, principles and main tasks of law enforcement and national security organs, Prosecutor-General, and government agencies • Definition of measures to ensure sufficient resources, material-technical capacities and criteria for assessment of law enforcement organs • Mechanisms for implementation of measures, including review of legislation, structural changes made by government and the development of a legal-normative basis by a working group under the Security Council of the KR</td>
<td>• Generally valuable complex of measures and demonstration of president’s readiness to support reform • No buy-in of MIA and law enforcement organs, as law prepared by Defense Council Secretariat • So far only structural changes implemented</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author
Alongside this inhibition of effective steps, it took another one and a half years for the CU to effect the next instructive legislative act, again based on a consultation with the PM. The introduction of ‘Guidelines on the foundations of the complex assessment of the activity of law enforcement organs of the Kyrgyz Republic’ in Governmental decree No 81 February 2015 included a component of external assessment with a participatory approach. However, the planned external assessment component excluded the CU’s participation. Thus, rather than being able to influence and participate in the MIA’s assessment of reform progress, the CU was relegated to the role of a bystander. The frustration this created among the network is well captured in the criticism of one activist, who called out the MIA’s narrow focus on material capacity building, such as buying cars and radios, and the frequent justification of insufficient reform progress with lack of budgetary resources:

‘If you want a reform then act, make sure there is money for it! When we talk to officials and ask them, is the reform happening?, they say, “Yes, it’s happening”. But where is it happening? It’s not clear. They buy new computers, cars and so on, and say it’s a reform, it’s their understanding of a reform, but I don’t think it can be called a reform.’

The time required to achieve the different steps and their insufficient addressing of demands or implementation of solutions indicate clear limits to the CU’s effectiveness in bringing about an alternative approach to police reform. It is also reflective of frictions in the interaction between the activists and ministerial and governmental officials. Given the acrimonious rhetoric and explicit criticism put forward by the CU, it is perhaps not surprising that top policy makers and law enforcement staff were surprised and overwhelmed by the demands of the activists. This astonishment is best understood in the context of the 2010 revolution and violent clashes

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12 Civic Union activist, conversation, Bishkek, 14 August 2015.
in the south of the country, after which law enforcement and internal affairs organs tried to create the perception that they were a guarantor of security and stability despite apparent irregularities. The CU was among a few actors daring to tackle the topic of police reform in such an outspoken manner since the Osh 2010 events (Marat, 2018, p 93). As one CU activist captured it: “Reform brings instability, that’s why they didn’t implement it after 2010. After Osh [the Osh events] people were affairs (afraid?) to touch the police [and reform it].”

Another important reason for the lack of understanding and engagement with the CU can be seen in the generational and professional remoteness of the young activists from the policy makers and internal affairs staff. The latter are usually civil servants who started their career and received education during Soviet and early post-Soviet years and have thus internalized principles such as hierarchy of command, military discipline, and loyalty to the nodes of power within the state system. Their counterparts from the CU were mostly part of a younger generation, who were not only inspired by their experience of political change in 2010 but also by their studies in political and social science and had embraced ideas about liberal-democratic reforms and accountable state institutions. This is not to essentialize these markers and their respective association with the ‘politics of sovereignty’ and Western ‘liberal peace’ imaginary, nor to say that they are completely incompatible. However, it does help to explain the determined, if not always explicit, resistance that the CU met in realizing its agenda. Ravshan Abdukarimov, ex-MIA officer and adviser to the CU, stylized the reactions the organization usually received as: “Don’t rush, don’t mess things up! Who are you in the first place? Do you want an office or what [Vam dolzhnost nuzhna?]?”

A good example of these animosities is a meeting of activists with law enforcement officials, including the then deputy minister of internal affairs, who took advantage of one activist’s limited command of the Kyrgyz language in addressing him. “It turned out later”, the activist explained vividly, “that he had told me to burn [in hell] [Ru.: sgoret], while I was nodding and acting as if I understood and appreciated what he was saying.” Abdukarimov further stated his recollection of a warning from the deputy minister for internal affairs during a meeting with MIA officials, that they should not try to enforce reforms “the hard way [‘ne po plokhomu!’].” Such interactions, which Marat’s analysis documents in further detail (2018, p 105), bear testimony to the social distance between the activists and ‘security professionals’ and the nuisance with which the latter

13 Conversation, Bishkek, 26 June 2015.
14 Interview, Bishkek, 20 August 2015.
15 Conversation, Bishkek, 19 August 2015.
16 Conversation, Bishkek, 20 August 2015.
regarded the former. This is visible in the body language of the activists and officials in their few meetings, as for instance in a consultation with then PM Otorbaev and p.p. Minister of Internal Affairs Turganbaev.\textsuperscript{17}

The division between the CU and authorities is further traceable in a discourse on different professional and vocational spheres, which was reproduced by different former security sector employees. Ravshan Abdukarimov’s remarks on how the ‘young folks’\textsuperscript{18} from the CU were leaving many authority representatives baffled was echoed in many conversations with supporters and activists of the network. One of them, a former law enforcement employee, explained: “People were laughing: Why did these young folks want to reform the police? … the higher echelons [leadership; \textit{nikovodstvo}] only began to understand step by step [what they wanted].”\textsuperscript{19} He further described the difference between the vocational spheres of the protagonists: “Civil society, this is a rather soft [\textit{bolee miakhkata}] part of society … the police, they just work through orders, they have completely different blood [\textit{u nikh sovsem drugie krov}].” This bifurcation between a security/law enforcement sphere and the ‘civic sphere’ foregrounds a broader claim about expertise and understanding of what is possible and desirable in reforming the police. Rather than engaging with the content of the CU’s proposals, some actors thus stressed the fact that the network’s expertise was insufficient and the nature and scale of their demands lay beyond what was realistically possible. This is best captured in the quote of an OSCE officer working on police reform: “I ask the question, what do you want from the Police? Civil society watches and argues without agreeing with each other … We are former police officers, we understand the best practices” (cited in \textit{Mangham, 2015}, p 33).

These statements make clear how embedded the divide between the CU activists and their policy maker counterparts – both national and international – was both in their agendas and interests, and in their lifeworlds and personal backgrounds. Rather than publicly rebuking the content of the CU proposals, it was implied that the activists were lacking ‘expertise’ and experience in questions of law enforcement and policing. Thus, even if the CU might have had the better arguments based on scientific analysis or factual knowledge, their lack of ‘expert knowledge’ and experience made it easy for (former) police and military staff to overrule them by claiming to be better equipped to take decisions and design programmes by virtue of their belonging rather than their knowledge.

\textsuperscript{17} See photograph on facebook account of Timur Shaikhutdinov; 23 September 2014, \url{www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10153337214711029&set=t.677446028&type=3}, [13 October 2021], as well as Lottholz (2021, figure 1).

\textsuperscript{18} The Russian term is \textit{rebiata} or \textit{molodye [young] rebiata}; it was often used by interview partners when referring to activists from the CU central office in Bishkek.

\textsuperscript{19} Conversation with territorial council head, Osh, 14 October 2015.
In light of such attempts by MIA and law enforcement officials to monopolize debates about police reform (see Marat, 2018, pp 96–7), the CU tried to acquire and strengthen their expertise and thus still make their demands heard in the national police reform process. One important way of doing so was to bridge the social, or sociological, gap between the ‘young folks’ and ‘military people’ (Ru.: liudi voennye) indicated above, by incorporating ex-police, law enforcement and MIA staff into the CU’s network and initiatives. Although this helped to qualify the demands and evidence base vis-à-vis policy makers to some degree, the CU’s impact on the reforms was still limited given inherent structural constraints and political manoeuvring. Rather than straightforwardly enforcing their agenda at the national level, the organization was forced to refocus efforts on working with communities to recruit new supporters and to practically apply and thus ‘prove’ the importance of their Co-Security approach with regard to power holders. One key way to realize this agenda and ‘mobilize facts’ in favour of their arguments (Berling, 2011) was to run various community security projects, one of which I analyse in the next section.

Practising and interpreting community security

In applying their Co-Security approach which emphasizes cooperation between society, local government and law enforcement organs, the CU had already gathered experience during the public hearings that fed into the drafting of the ‘Alternative conception’ for the police reform in 2011. Among a number of projects in 2015, the network won a tender to implement a project titled ‘Developing mechanisms of social partnership on questions of the provision of public security and crime prevention’ financed by the UNODC. The following steps were to be implemented in 12 pilot communities (CURR, 2016, p 8):

1. assessment of main community security issues and factors;
2. creation of working groups, including representatives from law enforcement, local administration, civil society and population;
3. discussion of possible measures to be taken to prevent security threats and tackle the identified issues, drawing up of a local community security action plan;
4. integration of the community security action plan into the local council’s (mestnyi/aiylnyi kenesh) budget and execution of the action plan by local self-governance bodies.

The implementation of these steps involved conducting initial research, consultations with community representatives and especially persuading local government representatives to welcome the initiative and the
recommendations and actions it would propose at the end of the project. It is thus understandable that the degree of project implementation and success varied between communities, and that localities with a support base of the CU network and its new Co-Security approach were more effective in realizing the project.

While the overall impression from the project’s analysis on the basis of participatory fieldwork is positive, the following analysis presents the CU’s work in two localities with varying performance, with one community having implemented the project most successfully and effectively (community 2)\(^\text{20}\) whereas participation in the other community appeared to be less valued (community 1).\(^\text{21}\) While doing the research in these two places, I was officially acting as a volunteer to support and facilitate the running of the respective training events and group meetings. This legitimated my presence and the inclusion of the observations into my research. A more explicit communication of this arrangement in community 2 seemed to enable a more constructive role and seems to have provided additional motivation for the working group. On the other hand, my less clearly announced role in community 1 precluded such positive side effects, but also foreclosed negative ones, such as discomfort or suspicion on the part of the working group members.

Three key dimensions of the CSWGs’ impact on the local security situation guide this analysis. First, I discuss and compare the status of the working groups in their respective local context, which concerns both the relevance and importance conferred on each group by its members and stakeholders and its complementarity with other administrative and security bodies. The second dimension, which I discuss separately for the respective community, concerns the way security problems and solution measures were being understood and constructed in rather simplistic ways and with a lack of consultation with the population groups affected by the issues in question. In a third step, I show how analytical practices and epistemic positionings expressed by the working groups can be situated within the imaginaries and discourses of statebuilding discussed in Chapter 3 and how they point to different constellations of post-liberal social ordering.

**Status of working groups**

In community 1, located north of Bishkek and bordering Kazakhstan, I attended working group meetings between August and November 2015,
during which I accompanied a CU activist, Galina – a Bishkek woman in her fifties – and assisted in arranging presentations, taking photos and documenting group conversations. Our shared impression was that the significance and potential of the CU’s project was either not sufficiently appreciated or duplicated the work of other bodies such as the LCPC and local council (mestnyi kenesh), which in turn limited the prospect of successful project implementation, and other issues such as infrastructure or the socioeconomic situation seemed more urgent. This impression was confirmed by a patchy attendance of group members, with only a handful of people being present at two of the meetings which had to be rescheduled, and an overall reluctance among attendees to contribute to discussions. This was best illustrated by two older women who during a working group meeting in August devoted most of their attention to reading their newspapers.

The difficulty of assembling more people and producing concrete results seemed to stem from both insufficient leadership and from the lack of a clear mandate of the group and/or awareness among participants and other stakeholders. One reason for this was the absence of the head of the aiyl okmotu (local administration), who, when Galina and I once met her accidentally, insisted that she simply could not find the time to participate, yet was reappointed head of the district administration a little later. Meanwhile, the deputy head of the local administration, a younger woman, did not appear to have the authority and resources to effectively mobilize and lead the group.

The lack of leadership and awareness of the purpose and possible value of the community’s participation in the project became especially obvious in a training session in November. The programme manager of the funding organization, UNODC, was also present and did not hesitate to state her concern about the group’s low turnout and lack of participation and engagement in discussing ways to tackle local security issues. Toward the end of the meeting, she addressed those who had not left yet and explained the purpose of the project and the general context of UNODC’s work in the community: “What’s the whole point with this [local security] plan?” she rhetorically asked. “It will be your tool … but how can you make a plan with only three people?” She further encouraged the attendees to more actively approach the police and ask police staff to participate in light of UNODC’s investment into building a new local police station (Poselkovyi otdel militsii or POM): “Look, we invest 30,000 dollars to improve things here … get in touch with the police so that they attend all of the meetings!”

This wake-up call led the deputy head of the aiyl okmotu to endeavour more firmly to invite all group members, including the police neighbourhood inspector and local council members. These attended the next meeting three weeks later and contributed to a more constructive discussion on the prioritized security issues and possible actions. We were also informed that,
as indicated in an initial report, the LCPC, women’s council and aksakal court were actively working on preventing crimes and social tensions, which highlighted the above-mentioned concerns about duplicating ongoing work and about the project’s low attractiveness compared to infrastructural and other development projects run by development agencies from nearby Bishkek. Priority issues and an action plan to tackle them were nevertheless agreed after long-winded discussions.

In contrast to the above, community 2 was something like a poster child of the CU’s community security project. This was unsurprising, as their LCPC had received a lot of capacity-building support from Saferworld and the Foundation for Tolerance International. This prior experience of the working group members and the local authorities’ openness to community security work gave the project a good starting position. An important reason for the heightened interest and involvement of all stakeholders was the town’s location along the border with Uzbekistan, which had put it into the focus of national authorities and implied intense movements of goods and people in the region, as part of the wider transfer routes of the Ferghana Valley. This circulation appeared to have driven the rise of so-called ‘non-traditional’ religion, that is practices and denominations which became increasingly popular among the population and were believed to have led to a sizeable number of people reportedly leaving to join the Islamic State in Syria. This ‘frontier’ status of the community in the context of international violent extremism had necessitated local authorities’ and activists’ cooperation with national-level bodies such as the Tenth Main Administration under the MIA for Countering Radicalism and Extremism, in short ‘tenth department’ (desiatyi otdel), and the State Committee for National Security (GKNB). The latter had participated in dialogue events held by the LCPC and had overseen measures to reduce and prevent the recruitment activities of ‘non-traditional’ religious groups. This embeddedness of the local working group in national efforts of countering radicalization made the group members aware of the importance of their work, but also increased the pressure to identify and counteract radicalization and its root causes.

23 The biggest national NGO in the area of peacebuilding and community security; see Chapter 5.
24 LCPC representatives had indicated issues such as illegal border crossings by Kyrgyz citizens and conflicts with Kyrgyz border troops over electric energy usage. Interview on 11 July 2015; see Saferworld (2016, p 25).
25 In Russian, Desiatoe Glavnoe Upravlenie pri MVD po protivodeistviu radikalizma i ekstremizma.
26 Interview with LCPC representatives, 11 July 2015 (see Saferworld, 2016).
The prior collaboration and experience had also led to the development of a group spirit and friendships between some members of the local working group, as became obvious in the small talk when we set up the room for one training session in the local administration building.27 The female leader of the group, who was also the deputy head of the aïyl okmotu, had been running the work in this community for years and talked to people in a positive and encouraging way but did not hesitate to oppose misguided and exaggerated opinions, either. The attendance and active participation of two neighbourhood inspectors and one youth affairs inspector from the police marked another contrast to community 1. The working group further included a range of local council (mestnyi kenesh) members, representatives from different bodies under the LCPC (the youth committee, the elders or aksakal court), the deputy head of local imams and head teachers from the local schools, among others.

Besides the composition of the group, its links to the other institutions seemed well developed, also thanks to the CU’s proactive networking in the form of visiting the aïyl okmotu head after the event to discuss the result of the training, planned action steps and the necessity to include the group’s action plan into the annual budget plan. Close ties were also maintained with the head of the local police station (POM), which was being renovated with the financial support of UNODC as in community 1, but whose staff demonstrated a cooperative attitude and commitment vis-à-vis the local administration and CSWG members. For instance, the POM head gave the CU team (including myself) a tour of the police station and drove us to the restaurant where the working group was having lunch after the training event.

Besides these intrinsic and structural sources of motivation, the two CU activists, Urmat and Timur, appeared to be running the training that I attended and the general communication with the group quite effectively. At the beginning of the event, they restated both the CU’s founding idea and the role that the group in this community played in this mission: “The main idea of our work is to maintain law and order on the local level … people here can decide for themselves who is supposed to decide, whether it is the local leaders, the Regional Internal Affairs Administration, or others.” The activists also took a proactive and explicit stance in introducing me and my background: “Philipp here is producing a large academic work. He is writing about how we are building a normal country [kak stroim normalnuiu stranu].” Judging by later conversations I had with group members, this sufficed for me to become accepted as part of the project’s collective endeavour and to foreclose concerns about

27 The following analysis is based on participatory observations during a working group training and planning session on 11 November 2015.
suspicion or discomfort on the part of the group (see Bekmurzaev et al., 2018, p 111). Further appreciation of the group members’ work was expressed in the awarding of the Co-Security prize for ‘IDN of the year’ to the town’s juvenile affairs inspector at a national-level forum held by the CU later the same month, which reaffirmed the ‘poster child’ status of this community.

Understanding of security problems and solutions: community 1

Preliminary research and focus group discussions identified the priority security issues of (1) road security; (2) drug consumption and dealing; (3) vulnerability of children; (4) tensions between different groups and individual dwellers. However, during the meetings I attended the group appeared split in their opinion on some issues and ways to tackle them. Disagreement was most consistent – although rarely explicated – on the issue of drug trade and consumption in the community. Various group members voiced their doubts that this was an issue significantly pertaining to the community’s security, or that it was even a problem in the first place. “We don’t have such a problem right now”, said an elderly Kyrgyz wearing a kalpak during the meeting in August, although he admitted, “Yes, that’s possible”, when Galina said it had been raised during initial focus groups. “If it is possible to uncover incidents, then there is a problem”, said the local school’s head teacher, suggesting that the problem was only of priority if concrete evidence could be presented. Thus, the group eventually removed the item from the agenda, and a loose agreement was made that preventive work should be done in schools. This demonstrates the working group’s power to set the agenda and decide on the urgency of a security issue, and even its very inclusion into the action plan. Although there was little disagreement within the group as to the minor importance of drug consumption and trading, a more holistic understanding of this would only have been possible by juxtaposing this point of view with the perspectives put forward during the initial focus groups.

In a similar way, the relevance of ‘tensions between different groups, especially between inhabitants and migrants from other regions of the country and [ethnic Kyrgyz] from Tajikistan’ for the community security action plan was contested. A way of life where everyone was for themselves seemed to have been established in the community long ago, and actual tensions and conflicts seemed to be a rare occurrence. Thus, the problem seemed to lie more in the disinterest and single-mindedness of the different groups toward each other, which, as some group members suggested on the second meeting for planning concrete action steps, might be overcome by reinvigorating the spirit of national unity and patriotism. The post-Soviet multicultural slogan ‘We are all Kyrgyzstanis!’ (Ru.: My vse Kyrgyzstantsy!)
was invoked by several group members alongside the idea that ‘people should be taught to love their nation’. The group agreed that educational and prophylactic work, including gatherings between groups, had to be done to further strengthen the sources of unity within the village and resolve the paradox that, in the words of a local council member, “On Friday [at the Islamic namaz prayer] everyone greets each other but then go their way and don’t care about each other anymore”.

Much more consensus could be found on the problem of (5) ‘grazing of cattle and damage to communal areas and harvest’, which was added to the list later on. The working group members attributed the overgrazing of communal areas and destruction of arable land and harvest particularly to so-called ‘new arrivals’ or priezzhye, many of whom had their livestock grazing all over the central village green, which was legally prohibited and led to the deterioration of this area into a plain of bare soil and decrepit trees. In the early November meeting, group members had remarked how this was rooted in the new arrivals’ attitude toward the state and social order more generally. “For the natives, it is a shame to see that for the new arrivals the law doesn’t count”, as one dweller summed up a common sentiment. While this picture went unchallenged in that meeting, the working group meeting later that month was also attended by an elderly man who listened to the discussions and wanted to add his view on the problem, but seemed to go unnoticed by the rest of the group. While the group was hotly discussing, he got up from his seat at the back of the room, distant from the rest of the group, inhaled hastily to raise his voice, extended his hand to be called to speak and quietly – although audibly for those who paid attention – remarked, “I am a new arrival, for instance”. Neither Galina nor any group member noticed him, thus missing out on hearing the point of view from the people concerned in this debate.

This clearly indicated the limits to the participation of representatives of all different groups and categories of village dwellers in the working group, as well as the potential of missing certain points of view during discussions, especially when they are heated and emotional. What somewhat inevitably resulted from this limited inclusiveness of the group and its bold way of trusting their own opinion and knowledge about the problems in their

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28 The neighbourhood inspector further made clear that, contrary to the dominant ‘mentality’ among the Kyrgyz, it would be inappropriate to invoke the ‘ethnic’ category when talking about the different groups. Yet, while ‘native’ village dwellers were quite diverse, the ‘new arrivals’ were predominantly Kyrgyz ‘re-settlers’ from Kyrgyz territories in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (so-called ‘Kyrgyz-Kairylmany’).

29 ‘Dla korennykh obidno, chto dla novykh zakon ne deistvuet’. The person put forward the example of people cutting trees in the village area. Participatory observation, 6 November 2015.
community is a certain degree of objectification and patronization with regard to other groups. Rather than a critique, this is to be understood in the context of the generally benevolent intentions of the group’s members and the logics of provision and care according to which they apparently saw it as their responsibility to provide ‘the others’ with security or create a secure and peaceful environment.

Another example of the limited inclusivity of the group is the role of the youth committee, which seemed to be non-existent beyond a list of members presented on a blackboard next to the other local institutions and their staff. One young man had attended all of the meetings but had not made any contribution to the discussions, although they revolved around juvenile delinquency, car races organized by the local youth and the problem of drug trade and consumption. When I dared to make one of my very few interventions and asked why the group was not consulting their youngest member when discussing possibilities of keeping young people busy and distracting them from delinquent activities and ‘hooliganism’, the answer was unbelievable for me but perhaps descriptive of the situation: “He sits quite far away [daleko sidit]”, remarked one attendee and another just dismissed my initiative: “The elderly will sort it out for him [Dlia nego pozhibye reshajut]” – and on went the discussion. This reluctance to engage with specific groups that play a crucial part in or are affected by the community’s security issues limits the scope of both the analysis of the situation in this community and the potential to effectively tackle security issues.

Understanding of security problems and solutions: community 2

Consistent with earlier experiences discussed above, the increased radicalization and alignment with ‘non-traditional’ sects among the population was one of two core issues identified as a particular challenge by the working group. A major factor of the occurring shift in beliefs and practices of Islam was the activity of missionaries who visited the town from outside, either from elsewhere in Kyrgyzstan or from neighbouring Uzbekistan. Correspondingly, one major concern for some group members was how to block the access of such missionaries or prohibit their seemingly illegal practices. “They should be completely prohibited from entering [the town]”, posited one NGO activist during the group meeting and visibly captured the group’s general fatigue with the issue. The head of the group and deputy aiyl okmotu head agreed but urged the members for more modesty: “Our main goal is to maintain public control. I agree [the foreign missionaries need to be controlled] but it has to be according to some rules [na baze kakih-to pravil].” Furthermore, the deputy head of the local imams argued against the earlier proposition
on the ground that recruitment of supporters for radical Islamic sects and their incitement to join the fighting in Syria was mostly done via the internet. Therefore, he argued, tackling the foreign missionaries might not even be the most effective way of reducing radicalization and extremism in the town. After a long discussion, the group agreed that prohibiting missionaries’ access appeared unfeasible and that they needed to focus on getting more information and a clearer view on the visitors’ movements and activities.

Another core problem was the desperate situation among local youths and the widespread hooliganism, school racketeering and violence taking place among them. The discussion on ways of overcoming this situation was in some ways very similar to the one that took place in community 1, as all group members seemed to see the problem more or less in comparison with their own upbringing and the pride and dignity that had been part of their everyday life during the late days of the Soviet Union. The strongest proponent of a re-establishment of long-vanished virtues was the neighbourhood inspector of the police, who emphasized his view that a more serious consideration of conscribing a higher number of youths for military service could enhance their ‘discipline’. This was met with exclamations across the meeting room and followed by a controversial discussion. The head teacher of a local school adamantly raised her concern of such a reinvigoration of youths’ attitude through a militarized national culture, especially given the connotations this had in terms of excluding different national minorities who would not subscribe to such ideas or simply were not eligible for conscription due to lack of Kyrgyzstani citizenship. “Excuse me,” she concluded, “but if Kyrgyzstan is only for the Kyrgyz, then all others will already feel afraid [to drugie uzhe boiatsa] … if it’s only about ‘us’, ‘ours’, ‘this is for us’ … [esi eto tolko ‘my’, ‘nashi’, ‘eto nam’ …]”.

While there was general agreement that patriotic education and military-style disciplining of young people might be too divisive, the group leader expressed her own observation of the gendered nature of the lack of discipline and esteem among people: “You know what the problem is all about?”, she addressed the CU activists and me. “We don’t have any men, there are only women in the schools … The racketeering is spreading without any male authorities counteracting it … in any case, a man is a man [vse ravno, muzhchina – eto muzhchina].” While this suggestion that women lack the authority and competence to effectively deal with issues of racketeering and authority might sound patriarchal and misogynistic, it is suggestive of the wider gender implications of the marketization and political economy of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, as well as the incapacitation of the education system it has conditioned (DeYoung, 2007). The fact that average wages do not enable people to secure a family’s livelihood forces most male breadwinners or even parent couples to work abroad and to leave their children to be
raised by partners, grandparents, or more remote kin and even neighbours, with significant implications for their emotional and psychological well-being (see Chapter 5).

Although having little idea as to which measures might be helpful in tackling the problem without marginalizing anyone’s interests or needs, the group agreed that organizing sports tournaments and ‘cultural mass events’ – in the style of *KVN* for instance – might be useful to further facilitate young people’s creative and organizational talents, and they planned to devise more specific measures at a later point. Rather than tackling the root causes of violence and addressing them with responsible state institutions and higher-level bodies, the working group thus focused on doing all it could to manage the situation on the ground. Further planned measures of ‘meetings with parents’ and ‘joint raids conducted by police and activists from villages in the evening time to prevent criminal behaviour’ confirm this pre-emptive logic and the focus on behavioural change.

**Potentials, implications and interpretation of community-level projects**

The observations from the implementation of the largest community security project of the CU in 12 pilot communities so far allow some conclusions about the post-liberal condition of community security and its ramifications for wider social ordering and institutional reform processes. The project generally presented a great success given that the action plans were approved by local authorities in all 12 communities and received budgetary allocations for the realization of the planned measures. Still, as the participatory observation from two project communities shows, the change brought about by the CU’s Co-Security approach was, in many ways, performative and limited to a few measures, rather than tackling underlying structural issues. Relatedly, the impact of the project is inherently contingent, negotiated and in need of being illustrated, for instance with clearly improving relations among different actors or through references to better crime statistics. Thus, as Graef (2015, ch 8) has observed in relation to legal empowerment interventions in Liberia, the relevance, impact and success of the project need to be constantly negotiated and maintained, while critical reflection on side effects and encountered problems and limitations are of secondary importance.

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30 Literally *Klub veselykh i nakhodchivykh* or ‘Club of the merry and ingenuous’, a format combining quiz show and comedy elements, which is firmly established in post-Soviet states’ entertainment culture and is practised by numerous student or youth *KVN* associations.
That said, as the research on the above communities and reporting from others has shown, the project had the irrevocable impact of initiating a dialogue between local administrations, law enforcement and populations. This dialogue had the potential to effect a more meaningful consideration of the needs of different population groups and to then reflect these needs in appropriate measures. On the other hand, the above analyses also demonstrate how the security working groups tended to occupy a moral and epistemic high ground in analysing issues and making decisions, while possibly failing to engage and consult with groups or people affected by, or associated with, security or crime issues. This was most obvious in the case of the working group of community 1 failing to listen to representatives of the local youth and ‘new arrivals’. Similarly, community 2 appeared to be more preoccupied with curbing the activity of missionaries than with understanding the reasons for missionary activity and whether and how it was actually associated with the reported recruitment of violent extremists. These ways in which the working groups related to their communities are reflective of paternalistic understandings of governance and social ordering which, as I have argued, are rooted in the mode of social organization practised during Soviet times.

Another basic impact relating to the latter aspect was thus to help working group members in community 1 become aware of their common heritage and the inspiration they once used to draw from the discourse on Soviet modernity and ‘peoples’ friendship’ (druzhba narodov), which was carried forth in the slogan ‘We are all Kyrgyzstanis’ in the Akaev period and invoked by working group members. This positioning in the ‘politics of sovereignty’ imaginary was also the case in community 2 given its frontier status at the Uzbek border and in the fight against violent extremism. This group also demonstrated adherence to elements from the ‘tradition and culture’ imaginary, particularly in its differentiation of ‘non-traditional’ religion from the dominant denomination of Hanafi Islam. This positioning of the working groups’ approaches to and understandings of community security in the ‘politics of sovereignty’ imaginary was also effectively used by the CU activists holding the training in community 2. They invoked the patriotic dimension of the project as a way to curry support for both their agenda and my presence as a researcher-cum-volunteer, who would document how the project served to ‘build a normal country’ in this and other pilot municipalities. In this sense, the CU managed to position itself in the available imaginaries of social ordering while its transformative agenda, located more in the Western ‘liberal peace’ imaginary, remained intact.

The critical considerations about working groups’ representativeness and competence to decide for the rest of the community leads to a broader argument about the epistemic dimension of the shift toward post-liberal community security and statebuilding. As I have shown, the working group
and LCPC members had a near monopoly on deciding which issues in their community were of priority and should thus be worked on, and which were of minor importance or not problematic at all. In community 1, this meant that drug consumption and trading was eventually taken off the priority list. In another, third community I visited during my fieldwork, community members even refrained completely from mentioning any problems in the community vis-à-vis the police and myself (see vignette in Bekmurzaev et al, 2018, p 115), even though the large-scale violence that had struck that community back in 2010 made it virtually impossible for all issues to have been solved five years later (Bennett 2016; Ismailbekova and Karimova, 2018; see also Chapter 5). It thus seems that denying the importance or very existence of certain issues, and especially the wrongdoing of the city administration and law enforcement, is perceived as a matter of sticking to unwritten rules of what can be said and what cannot. By insisting that everything is going well, working group or LCPC members appear to hope to shield the community from scandalizing reports and to build a constructive relationship with authorities and law enforcement.

Following a similar logic, no explicit criticism was voiced in community 2, which was perceived as a largely successful case, but would require more scrutiny as to whether there are disagreements between the different actors involved in community security. Community-level cooperative security provision and social ordering seem to depend on a suspension of epistemic ambiguities – for example, as to where and how recruitment of foreign fighters really takes place, or what would really be the best way to keep the youth from getting into conflict with one another and the law. The observed processes thus present a post-liberal modality characterized by uncertainty instead of a fully explicit exchange of opinions and criticisms.

In this sense, it can be argued that the working groups’ activities were geared toward a post-liberal politics of conflict management and peace performance, similar to the LCPCs in Chapter 5 and TYCs in Chapter 6. On the one hand, this is understandable given the limited resources, time, skills and knowledge available. On the other hand, it is also important to acknowledge how a focus on empirically observable results, such as the reduction of fighting or racketeering among the youth or of the amount of recruitment of foreign fighters, might make community security practitioners susceptible to disregarding the possibilities of addressing root causes of such issues and improving authorities’ approaches in dealing with them.

These observations suggest that, even if newly established cooperation between police and local community workers should be acknowledged as a success of the CU’s work, it is not always clear to what baseline such a ‘success’ is compared, how acute community security issues may be in a given community, and how well-suited they are for illustrating the
appropriateness and effectiveness of the CU’s approach. This relativity of success and impact of reform practices necessitates an effective approach on the part of the CU to interpret or – in Berling’s (2011) words – ‘mobilize’ the overall results of this project, so as to back up claims and demands for more cooperative and people-centred approaches in community-level law enforcement. The CU have done that effectively in statements such as: ‘After all, this worked in the countryside, where we have worked. There, the number of cattle thefts, car accidents, domestic violence and school racketeering cases in fact decreased.’

This emphasis on the overall positive impact of the project has helped the network to establish and consolidate its image as an organization basing its claims in police reform debates on concrete actions on the ground. To this end, the achievements of the UNODC-financed project and follow-up work were widely shared in press coverage, which I analyse in the next section as part of the CU’s wider approach to knowledge production.

### Producing (and ignoring) knowledge

As a final key strategy employed by the CU, this section turns to the different forms of knowledge production that the network engaged in and their implications for achieving more substantive and sustainable reform. The network’s role in this regard is to draw on conceptual knowledge from outside the Kyrgyz Republic and adapt and ‘translate’ it into the national context; a position that is best captured in the Co-Security approach that is based on internationally acclaimed community security principles. The network’s knowledge production efforts consist mainly of writing and publishing empirical evidence and analyses in media commentary and research to support arguments for the alternative and more comprehensive reform agenda outlined above. Akin to Berling’s idea of ‘mobilizing facts’ (2011), the CU is putting forward empirical evidence from its own projects, law enforcement statistics and research from abroad to support its cause. However, as Berling also argues, the ‘lack of scientific knowledge’ does not inhibit the government from certain (in)action and from taking ‘[s]overeign decisions … at the limit of knowledge’ (2011, p 388), or even beyond what makes sense according to established knowledge.

Soon after its constitution in 2013, the CU started publishing regular media commentary and research on police reform. Having published

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31 ‘How your neighbour can ensure your safety’, 15 August 2017, Azattyk. Hereafter, research, commentary and other press coverage publications are cited with English titles, dates and source hyperlinks for sake of brevity; see supplement in note 34 for full list of sources.
altogether 37 publications in the past seven years, including project reports and commentaries on the progress of the police reform, the CU has created a knowledge base that is hard to ignore in debates about community security in Kyrgyzstan. Among other things, this is reflected by the fact that the network was twice invited to report to the national parliament *Jogorku Kenesh* to report on the progress of police reforms. The network’s efforts addressed a number of topics and pitched arguments to various audiences, including policy makers and the international community on the one hand and the wider population on the other. In an earlier analysis (Lottholz, 2021), I have tracked publications by and about the CU from the year 2016 until spring 2020 and grouped them by the following subject areas: (1) general coverage on reform progress and role of the CU; (2) results and follow-up activities of the UNODC-funded community security project; (3) ‘Patrol service reform’: commentary and discussions around the Road Patrol Service reform; (4) a research project conducted with the International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS) methodology; and (5) a donor-supported research project on racketeering conducted in schools.

As this publication analysis shows, the CU and particular individual members of it have managed to establish themselves as a voice in debates on police reform in general, including sub-aspects such as the Road Patrol Service reform, as evidenced in TV debates with key policy makers and other news coverage including the activists’ comments. Further sector-specific research projects and thematic threads, such as on crime victim statistics (ICVS) or school racketeering have served to put a spotlight on the challenges and insufficiencies of police work; in particular the low number of crime victims who say they would report to the police, and the lack of cooperation with educational and social institutions in the prevention of racketeering and youth violence.

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32 See https://reforma.kg/analytics/ for the list of publications in Russian.
34 This content analysis is available in a supplement at: www.tandfonline.com/doi/suppl/10.1080/13533312.2020.1792296
35 ‘Five on Channel 5: What’s happening with Kyrgyzstan’s police?’, 6 February 2019, Channel Five.
36 ‘More than 60 per cent of crime victims do not report to the police’, 24 February 2016, Azattyk.
37 For instance: ‘In Kyrgyzstan, the problem with violence in schools remains extremely worrying’, 24.kg; ‘Crime, racketeering, drug addiction. What’s surrounding Bishkek youth?’, 25 May 2018Osh, reforma.kg
Notwithstanding the CU’s holistic approach and the overbearing evidence it produced in favour of more comprehensive reforms, the years following its intervention have not brought much progress in national-level reforms. On the contrary, as also diagnosed in Marat’s analysis (2018, p 104), a gradual re-monopolization of the reform process by the government and MIA has taken hold. After presenting the Jogorku Kenesh with a new petition for a reform with concrete results,38 the scope for civil society input into the reform process became further limited by the decision to dissolve the Council for Reform and Development of the System of Law and Order. Although the Council was also criticized for the insufficient competence it was given (see above), the CU warned that its liquidation amounted to ‘stripping civil society from its right to have a stake in the reform process’, a problem further sustained by transferring the competencies of this organ to the ‘Council for Security and Public Order’, which did not include any civil society representatives.39 Further efforts of the CU included its reports on reform progress presented in parliament and the organization of two national forums in 2016 and 2018 in cooperation with MPs under the title ‘Co-Security and crime prevention policy in the Kyrgyz Republic’.40 In particular, the forums served as a platform for dialogue with decision makers and officials from the government and the MIA, who after the first forum passed a set of laws to restructure law enforcement, which the then secretary of the Defence Council qualified as ‘fundamental reform’.41 At the second forum in 2018, the CU not only received support from participating MPs42 but also from the then PM, Zhapar Isakov, who explicitly endorsed the idea of creating a ‘modern’ police force and ‘cooperation with citizens and civil society’ to replace the current militsiia with its controlling and punitive functions as well as military and authoritarian ethos.43 The congruence between Isakov’s plans and the demands of the CU to reform the militsiia into a politsiia (see 2011 petition) and a cooperative approach to law enforcement, suggests that the CU’s efforts bore some fruit, after all.

However, this progress was followed by an anti-liberal backlash against further concrete steps of reform, which is best illustrated by the fact that

39 ‘Society could be deprived of the right to take part in the police reform’, 5 April 2016, reforma.kg
41 ‘Law enforcement agencies in Kyrgyzstan will be cardinally reformed’, 4 June 2016, 24.kg
42 ‘Djanybek Bakchiev MP: Security should be a key element of modern society’, 11 June 2016, KNews.
43 ‘The reform of the militsiia into a politsiia is a tedious process, but a necessary one’, 3 March 2018, Kabar.
Isakov, who was in favour of substantive reform, was arrested by the State Committee of National Security (GKNB) and put on trial briefly after his resignation in June 2018, just three months after his statements on the CU’s Co-Security forum. While charges raised against him, relating to corruption and embezzlement in relation to repair measures at the Bishkek power station (Ru.: TETs) carried out by Chinese companies proved to be justified, the fact that they led to the end of his career and incarceration can be seen as the expression of disapproval of his reformist ambitions on part of a conservative political establishment around the then President Jeenbekov. The long reach and influence of the internal affairs apparatus already seemed apparent in the fact that changes undertaken in implementing the above-mentioned legislation were again of a superficial nature and largely limited to the renaming and restructuring of internal affairs structures into six separate services. The CU warned that such a ‘renaming is not yet a reform’ and did not diversify the MIA leadership’s de facto control over these services, which also still consisted of mostly personnel with a military background. The renaming and restructuring measures were the last actions of the MIA before the presidential elections in October 2018, in the aftermath of which no more substantial measures were undertaken at the national level where President Jeenbekov and his followers tightened their grip on power.

In the meantime, however, the CU had managed to consolidate its role as practice-oriented and knowledge-generating experts in law enforcement and crime prevention, as the achievements of the UNODC-financed project, the continued work with some communities in a small grants programme and another project implementing the Co-Security approach in the Sverdlov district of Bishkek were widely shared in press coverage and project reports (see ‘Pilot project’ column supplement linked in note 34). Another significant step forward was the creation, recruitment and piloting of a new patrol police unit in Bishkek, in which CU members were involved and cooperated with the Bishkek Main Administration of Internal Affairs (GUVD). In the national policy-making arena, cooperation with a group of MPs taking interest in further advancing police reforms led to

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45 ‘Six new services have been created in the MIA’, Azattyk.
46 ‘Renaming does not mean reform’, 10 August 2017, reforma.kg
48 ‘A joint plan allows for the mobilization of civic efforts and state authorities for crime prevention (final report)’, 24 August 2016, reforma.kg
49 ‘Societal monitoring of the patrol police’s work is starting in Bishkek’, 5 November 2019, KNews.
the institutionalization of a parliamentary oversight mechanism to review existing reform legislation and propose additional measures if necessary.\textsuperscript{50} Another hopeful development was the process toward a new Law ‘On the foundations of crime prevention’, in which CU members participated and which activists hoped would solve some of the contradictions and inertia inhibiting effective and needs-based law enforcement. The fact that this law was accepted on the third reading gave the activists new hope in an otherwise hopeless time marked by the ascent to power of Sadyr Japarov.\textsuperscript{51} The constitutional changes which, notwithstanding widespread protest, were approved in a referendum in April 2021 and have turned the country from a semi-presidential into a presidential governing system, cast doubt on the possibilities of the CU to further effect concrete reform steps, but need not preclude further reform progress that is already enshrined in recent legal and institutional changes.

Especially in light of recent events, it can thus be concluded that the overbearing evidence that the CU has produced in favour of more effective and wide-reaching reform measures has not led to a shift of the consensus among authorities. The scenario from Berling’s research (2011, p 393), where concerns over political stability and the ability to exert sovereign governmental control over law enforcement and internal affairs made decision makers refrain from yielding more oversight functions and decision-making participation to societal actors and public scrutiny, presents an apt description of events in Kyrgyzstan. On the other hand, as the recent successes and increasing cooperation with the CU among municipal administrations and Internal Affairs Offices (GUVD) as well as with parliamentarians show, the experience and relations the network has forged over the years present a strong basis for advancing their agenda in further pilot projects and national-level institutional changes. Thus, while the power holders might choose to ignore the evidence and arguments produced by the CU, such ignorance and mere imitation of reform are likely to be called out by people, as has happened in the case of the highly visible femicides of Burulai and Aizada discussed above. This suggests that more deep-reaching law enforcement reform is of wider popular interest. Given the persistence of assertive and illiberal actions on the part of the government and its repressive security apparatus, it becomes obvious how the, in many ways, ‘liberal peace’ police reform agenda of the CU and its supporters becomes hybridized into a post-liberal mode of governance.

\textsuperscript{50} See: ‘Police reform will be successful under parliamentary control’, reforma.kg
Conclusion

This chapter has taken the analysis of community security processes, their situatedness in imaginaries of social ordering and implications for a post-liberal mode of statebuilding in Kyrgyzstan further from the municipal level to the national level. This perspective presents a valuable contrast to, and extension of, the research presented in the previous chapters, where the entities examined were mostly subject to and dependent on the municipal administration, law enforcement and ministerial bodies deciding on their agenda and competencies. This chapter has demonstrated the transformative agenda of an exemplary civil society platform which sought to change not only the way that law enforcement organs work with local administrations, civil society and populations (as well as the terms of such cooperation). The CU’s far more bold endeavour consisted in also changing the overarching legal framework, the internal management, recruitment policies and the structure of the internal affairs apparatus itself.

The controversy and resistance to these plans have revolved around issues of belonging to the cohort of Soviet-trained and practically experienced law enforcement and security professionals claiming to have a better understanding of what is possible and desirable in police reform. In navigating and trying to overcome this disagreement, the mostly ‘young folks’ from the CU have built up and demonstrated a status of ‘experts’ and undertaken practices of knowledge production in order to back up their reform demands both in conceptual terms and with empirical results. The burden of evidence and strong case these efforts have produced in favour of a substantive reform in line with the Co-Security approach was hardly deniable and correspondingly embraced by the then PM Sapar Isakov’s announcement to create a new, modern politsiia to replace the country’s authoritarian and military-style militsiia. While Isakov subsequently faced a trial and prison sentence and the reform measures he envisaged were watered down, further successes of the CU as, for example, in setting up a parliamentary oversight mechanism and creating a new Patrol Police Service, which is currently being built up in all of Bishkek and expanded to the southern city of Osh, indicate that the network is successfully extending its alliances to withstand the anti-liberal backlash and politics of non-reform that has consistently taken hold in Kyrgyzstan in the past years. Nevertheless, my analysis has demonstrated that reform progress needs to constantly be negotiated and defended within the post-liberal knowledge regime where sound conceptions and objective evidence in favour of reform get ignored and overruled by the authorities’ main focus on maintaining state security and control.

Finally, a fruitful way of reading the interactions between not only the CU and their counterparts in the government and internal affairs apparatus
but also international organizations are the three imaginaries of social order defined in Chapter 4 and the post-liberal forms of statebuilding they foreground. The CU and its constituent organizations, foremost the Liberal Youth Alliance which contributed the most active members into the network, are very clearly associated with the Western ‘liberal peace’ imaginary and corresponding discourses of transparent, accountable and democratically governed institutions as well as anti-corruption. On the other hand, the activists were able to invoke other meanings and implications of police reform and cooperative community security practices, which resonated with discourses situated in the ‘politics of sovereignty’ imaginary. These include the discourse of Soviet modernity and nationalist patriotism, whether it is in the form of defending communities from foreign missionaries and religious influences by ‘building a normal country’ or by reinvigorating the multicultural awareness that ‘We are all Kyrgyzstanis’. These diverging ways of situating the network’s pilot project and wider endeavour helped the activists to claim a significant stake in the way the country’s law enforcement institutions and practices are reshaped. This interplay and mixing of the different imaginaries of social ordering foregrounds an order which is not predominately shaped by ‘liberal peace’ ideas, but realizes them in combination with or translation into Kyrgyzstani understandings of order, security and justice. Post-liberalism thus seems the best approach to capture the nature and implications of this order.